

(Done Second)

# SOME POETS OF THE COLLEGE.

APRIL 25, 1912.

Te veniente credit facies lætissima rerum.

It is one of the advantages of the dinners of this club and of every other opportunity of conversation among the Fellows of our College that the particular learning of each Fellow is improved and that he is both excited to the making of fresh observations and stimulated to increase his reading. It was the last volume of an abstruse work by a living Fellow of the College which led me to look at the writings of Johannes Genesius Sepulveda of Cordova (1602), wherein I found much interesting reading and came across this line, which will serve very well to use as a salutation to our President on his election and is certainly true of his cheery presence at this dinner.

If our College were to keep a poet, as our sovereigns still do and as the City of London once did, he would on occasions like this pour forth lines of verses expressing the congratulations which we all offer in our imperfect prose to Sir Thomas Barlow.

The works of our Fellows in each century show that we should always have been able to provide a College poet.

More than one of our Presidents would have replied in verse. Dr. John Argent, the President in 1633, complimented the Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge on his metrical version of Hippocrates.

“*Ardua succinte pandis Theōremata metris,  
Laudibus Hippocratis laus tua juncta manet,*”

and the celebrated Dr. Francis Glisson, President from 1667 to 1669, offered similar congratulations on the appearance of Ralph Winterton's book.

“*Non opus ut tingant sua pharmaca melle, medentes  
Ipsa fit in numeris mel Medicina tuis.*”

Nor has the office of President been the only one filled by a writer of verse. Our Registrar of 1627, Dr. Matthew Gwinne, wrote Latin verse less exact than that of our Registrar of to-day, but more copious. Of his tragedy of Nero, written in 1603, the following lines, spoken by the Emperor Claudius, are perhaps a sufficient example :

“ Ultra columnas Herculis, Solis vias,  
Nos terra novit omnis, et novit duces,  
*Cælo statuimus gloriam, imperium salo :*  
Cælo capita locamus, ingredimur solo.  
Cæsare favente, comite fortuna, duce  
Virtute, vinci quod volo, victum dabo.  
Vicisse juvat, at esse vincendum nihil  
(Da patria veniam) dispudet: *dubito tamen,*  
*Egone potius Cæsari, an Cæsar mihi*  
*Invideat : ille Britonas ostendit feros*  
Ego subjugavi; vidit, ego vici; tulit  
Repulsam inultus, ego triumphavi inclytus.”

It is curious that two other plays on Nero should have been written by another Fellow of the College, Robert Bridges, who, like Gwinne, has written Latin poetry, though these two plays are in English.

Gwinne also wrote a Latin comedy, ‘Vertumnus,’ the epilogue of which perhaps suggested to Shakespeare the salutations of the witches in ‘Macbeth.’ Gwinne makes three sibyls hail King James I by the titles first of Scotland, England and Ireland, and then by those of France and of United Britain, and alludes to his relationship with Banquo, thane of Lochaber.

I like to think that our College has in two compositions a connection with the greatest name in English literature.

The plot of ‘As you like it’ is based upon the romance of ‘Rosalynde,’ by Thomas Lodge, a poet who was examined by the Censors with Harvey, and who later received the licence of the College.

The portraits of the two best poets of the College are at the top of the staircase; Arbuthnot, by his friend Jervas, just outside the door of the Censors’ room, and Garth, by Kneller, just within it.

Arbuthnot’s discussion of the origin of human beings, and Garth’s meditations on their end, are surely the finest lines which any poets of our College have produced.

“ What am I? how produced? and for what end?  
Whence drew I being? to what period tend?

Am I th' abandoned orphan of blind chance ?  
Drop'd by wild atoms in disordered dance ?  
Or from an endless chain of causes wrought,  
And of unthinking substance, born with thought ?  
By motion which began without a cause,  
Supremely wise without design or laws ?  
Am I but what I seem, mere flesh and blood ;  
A branching channel, with a mazy flood,  
The purple stream that through my vessels glides,  
Dull and unconscious flows like common tides :  
The pipes through which the circling juices stray,  
Are not that thinking I, no more than they :  
This frame compacted with transcendent skill,  
Of moving joints obedient to my will,  
Nurs'd from the fruitful glebe, like yonder tree,  
Waxes and wastes ; I call it mine not me.”

Such are those of Arbuthnot's *Γνῶθι σέαυτον*; and Garth's three lines are of as good a quality.

“ To Die is landing on some silent shore  
Where billows never break nor tempests roar,  
E'er well we feel the friendly stroke 'tis o'er.”

Cowper seems to have had both these poems in his mind when writing his lines “On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture out of Norfolk.”

It would be easy to show how in many other ways our College is woven into the web of poetry, more complex and firmer than the famous knot of Navarre which the Kings of France bore in their arms.

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